

Achilles Tendonitis



DEFINITION

The achilles tendon is the broad band of fibrous tissue that connects the lower limb muscles at the back of the leg (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the heel bone (calcaneus). The achilles tendon is the thickest, strongest tendon in the body, often subjected to 10 times the body weight during running. Tendonitis refers to inflammation and irritation of the tendon resulting in swelling and pain, it is estimated that achilles tendonitis accounts for approximately 11% of all running injuries.

CAUSES

The cause of Achilles tendonitis can be multifactorial; overuse from increased sports activity, over-pronation, mal-alignment of the foot and lower limb, poorly constructed and unsupportive footwear, tight calf muscles, injury and even certain medications can contribute to this condition

SYMPTOMS

Achilles tendonitis can either be acute or chronic. Typically the main complaint with achilles tendonitis is pain at the back of the heel, usually about 3cm above the heel bone (calcaneus), pain usually occurs after periods of inactivity, therefore people tend to experience pain upon rising (first thing in the morning or after sitting). People tend to also experience pain during activities such as running or jumping, when the tendon is strained the most.

TREATMENT

As with all inflammatory conditions, rest and cold therapy (initially) is advised. The use of a heel raise helps take some of the strain off the tendon. Correct footwear to suit your foot type is essential and sometimes anti-inflammatory medication is also beneficial (consult your Doctor). Further treatment such as wearing Realign insoles to accommodate any abnormal foot mechanics such as over-pronation may also help. A detailed assessment by a Podiatrist is also advised. Physical therapy incorporating ultrasound, massage, and the appropriate rehabilitation exercises is often beneficial and this may be undertaken by a Physiotherapist. Early intervention is critical as chronic achilles tendonitis can be very difficult to resolve, possibly requiring steroid injections and/or surgery.

